



Narratological Analysis of English as a Second Language Students' Success Stories

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Abstract: *This article attempted to analyze the success stories of students at the tertiary level in an ESL context during the COVID-19 remote learning mode. This paper provided a meta-analysis of the narrative analysis using Polanyi's framework (Polanyi, 1981). I argued that these success stories provided data to evaluate the conversational narrative framework on structural components and this meta-analysis highlighted the problems as well as the potentials of Polanyi's conversational narrative model of analysis in the field of narratology. Data revealed that such evaluation of a conversational narrative's non-Story world clauses offered critical insights as Polanyi delineated in her model.*

Introduction

The success stories of students attempt to analyze the conversational narratives to gain insight using the narrative model of analysis both what it does and does not help explain the narrative. The purpose of this paper is to document the stories of second language learners using Polanyi's cultural analysis framework (1981, 1985) which deals with how cultural presuppositions and expectations shape the stories that are told (Polanyi, 1989). There has been significant literature examining the complex relationship between student belief and classroom practices in an ESL context (Barkhuizen, 2011; Rose & McKinley, 2018) but stories like these from students' viewpoints have not been analyzed earlier in Pakistan and especially document students' remote learning

experiences in the wake of COVID-19 crisis. These success stories focus on the students of an English language class and explore how the narrative analysis method can better allow us to develop insight and give a practical understanding of the complex relationship between a language learner and remote learning (Hornberger, 2002).

This article argues that these success stories provided data to evaluate this conversational narrative framework on structural components and this meta-analysis highlight the problems as well as the potential of Polanyi's conversational narrative model of analysis in the field of narratology. This paper presents these findings considering collected stories from high achievers from an English language class. The focus of this

study is to demonstrate what made these learners achieve success and how they document and recount their journeys in a story and apply a narrative framework to show an alternative to examine the viability of Polanyi's conversational narrative model.

Literature Review

There have been assorted studies in the past that study narrative at various levels and in different contexts. Starting from the structural approaches in narratology, Wallace Martin's book *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Martin, 1986) was a pioneer study in the structural approach in narratology that later such seminal works were proposed by Propp (1958) (Propp, 1968), Barthes (1966) (Barthes & Duisit, 1975) and Prince (1973) (Prince, 1973). On this structuralist approach, Labov and Polanyi built their framework of conversational analysis. Martin rightly indicated that structural analysis of a story structure would show how a single surface structure is connected to several deep structures as many as there are interpretations. Based on this structural approach, this paper attempts to explore the success stories of the students in the English language context and classroom. There have been myriad studies in ESL perspectives in Pakistan exploring different dimensions and perspectives, but no study has yet been undertaken to analyze the students' success stories applying the conversational framework of Polanyi. This paper is an attempt to bridge this gap.

Polanyi's Conversational Narrative Framework

The narrative analysis allows multiple insights into a narrative and many conversational narrative models can be applied in the studies of narratology. The framework that has been chosen for this paper is based on Polanyi's book 'Telling the American Story' published in 1985. In her book, she acknowledges the works of her predecessors like the works like Labov and Waletzky (1967) and Labov (1972) (Labov & Waletzky 1997; Macaro, Akincioglu, & Dearden 2016). Her work further elaborates on

conversational narratives and how the interactivity of such narratives operates in a story. She makes a distinction in the classification of narrative clauses as Polanyi terms them as non-Story world Clauses. Her basic purpose is to outline the narrative through an analysis of that narrative.

Her framework is structural that divides and defines the sundry components of a conversational narrative. Polanyi states that these narratives are derivatives of Durative-Descriptive Clauses, Main Line Story Event clauses, and non-Story world clauses (Polanyi, 2005). Durative-Descriptive clauses for Polanyi comprise items like the descriptions of characters, motivations, settings, habitual routines, iterative, or non-instantaneous events, and actions that remain semantically construed to be off the central timeline. She defines the Main Line Story Event Clauses in these words: 'A series of successive instants in the narrated world which correspond to the moving reference point in the narrative construction of that world. Event clauses are semantically noniterative, non-habitual, and temporarily bounded' (Polanyi, 1989). For her, Main Line Story Event Clauses convey the impediment and solution as she labels them as complications and resolution in a conversational narrative.

Polanyi in her framework offers a new type of clause that she labels as the non-Storyworld Clause that includes information outside of a Storyworld and she thinks of it as an essential category to introduce for analyzing a conversational narrative (Polanyi, 1989). She considers that this non-Storyworld information contains essential information to further build on for that conversational narrative that may or may not be related to the narrative. For her, Polanyi emphasizes the significance of evaluation in a conversational narrative and draws a difference between a narrative and what she merely terms a story. For any narrative to qualify as a story it must have evaluation. She states: "evaluation . . . is accomplished by encoding the information to

be accorded increased weight in a way which departs from the local norm of the text" (22). She emphasizes the conversational position of evaluation by emphasizing how it can be maneuvered by the audience to construe the narrative from the narrator's perspective: "Evaluation allows the story recipients to build up a model of the relevant information in the text which matches the teller's intentions as signaled by how the information about the Storyworld is communicated" (21). She asserts that evaluation is attained with numerous evaluative procedures, but that there are no fixed procedures to achieve it in a narrative. She means to say that "any device available for evaluation can be used non-evaluatively as well or can be so over-used that it becomes a textual norm" (22). These devices include discourse-level strategies, syntactic features, and phonological phenomena.

Polanyi clearly distinguishes evaluations into two types in her framework: one is contential evaluation and the other is deictic evaluation. Contential evaluation contains an evaluating tool that is evaluating the clause in which the tool is situated whereas deictic evaluation comprises the evaluation of information contained in one clause by devices that happen in other clauses. These two types of evaluations are not mutually exclusive, thereby one clause can inhibit equal characteristics of deictic and contential evaluation. She discusses the linguistic structure of a narrative by analyzing, one may identify which elements in a narrative are of utmost pertinent to the narrator, and the whole Polanyian paradigm of a conversational narrative is pitched for the culmination of what she calls the Adequate Paraphrase of a narrative. She writes: It is possible to construct a paraphrase of the telling, and an Adequate Paraphrase, using only the most heavily evaluated mainline story events (key events) and the most heavily evaluated durative descriptive information (crucial contextualizing information or CCI). The Adequate Paraphrase, composed entirely of the elements singled out by the teller for special emphasis, eliminates all incidental propositions (Polanyi, 1989). Thus,

Polanyi's framework provides a structural outline to analyze the success stories of students and therefore constitutes a methodology for meta-analysis of these stories.

Research Methodology

In this section, the research methodology will be discussed and the procedure that the researcher undergoes will be highlighted. The subject who participated in this study is students in the second semester, who have secured A Grades in their first semester in English subjects and have resorted to studying remotely due to the closure of academic institutions in Pakistan. These students belong to different areas of Pakistan both urban and rural. Their classes have gone from face-to-face to virtual modes due to COVID-19 being outspread. The question that has been asked from the participants is 'tell us how did you get an A Grade in the previous semester in an English course?' The oral testimony from these learners who secured Grade A is an important source of data. This results in data that is invaluable because unshielded truth emerges from it that is rich in spontaneous effects. The data sample that has been gathered for this research was obtained by asking the subject to reveal their journey and how did they get an A grade in English in their previous semester during the COVID-19 crisis. Their responses have been recorded uninterrupted and the researcher allowed them to take the thinking time to recount their journey. This oral narrative also includes periodic silences or pauses, false starts, emphases, elongated vowels, repetition, and non-lexical that can indicate notable features (Barkhuizen, 2011; Labov & Waletzky 1997; Polanyi, 1989). Although the spoken language must be transformed into a written text, these dimensions of the speech event cannot be legitimately ignored if the reader is to get the most accurate interpretation and not be misled (Riessman, 2001). Therefore, in this study, the transcription is as detailed as possible to best capture the narrative as it was spoken. Their spoken responses were later transcribed into a word document. These students are from tertiary

level education from a Pakistani public university and English as a subject is taught as a compulsory subject in all universities in Pakistan at all levels. The reason to select this group of students was to also explore how motivated they are to learn a second language i.e., English despite the fact multiple roadblocks in the way of gaining higher education in Pakistan. Their stories are documented in a friendly, relaxed, and normal way as the data was collected via online means as the institutions have again been shut down due to the second wave of COVID-19. These students are no different from any other student in the world, but these students are unique in what strategies they adopt and how they are learning a second language. A little number of students, barring the fact that these students belong to an underdeveloped country and must travel every day to nearby cities for internet connectivity even during the lockdown when the Government asked the citizens to curtail themselves to their private spaces.

Data Analysis

In this section, the data we gather from the students' success stories will be analyzed using Polanyi's framework. Included here as "events" are only those aspects of the story which meet our criteria of being encoded in main clauses with verbs in the simple past tense or historical present and which are non-durative semantically.

- I got
- We suffered from COVID-19
- I watched
- I read
- We attended eight physical (face-to-face) classes.
- We started
- I took
- I made

The evaluated durative-descriptive information revolves around the strategies that students adopted to get A-Grade in their English class. It also reflects the descriptions of their traits, their

motivation, habitual, iterative non-instantaneous actions, or/and events.

- I used to practice precise writing.
- I used to do my everyday assignments.
- 2-3 hours of focused study every day.
- We were moving towards a completely different environment.
- I used to attend all my classes.
- I started reading different articles and a lot of ideas on how essays are supposed to be written.
- I belong to a remote area of Baluchistan.
- It was helpful, especially for students who want to appear in competitive exams.
- It was my first semester, so I aspired to achieve good grades.
- We were having five classes in a week.
- I was expecting that was related to Grammar.
- The student was the one who was going to play an active part in it.
- I aspired to achieve good grades.

This part in Polanyi's framework refers to Main Line Story Event Clauses that open complications and resolution in a narrative.

- We were suffering from the Covid-19 pandemic and the classes were taken online.
- In this critical situation, I worked hard.
- Thus, I got an A Grade on the Exam.
- Due to the pandemic Covid-19, the university was closed, and we moved back to our homes.
- The biggest problem was the internet's non-availability and the transport to reach the city during the lockdown for attending classes online.
- Unfortunately, there was one month's leave due to COVID-19.
- Therefore, attempting exams on my understanding, I got an A grade.
- Learning grammar has always been my great fear.

- That is how I got an A Grade.
- I used to read books in Urdu but now I started reading English books.
- For the sake of essays, I started reading different articles with a lot of ideas on how essays are supposed to be written.
- First, of all we had to give a mid-examination, and, in the midterms, there was just one question related to précis writing and we had to do the précis writing.

The non-Story world clause part refers to the narrative part that is neither uttered by the narrator nor part of the story.

- That is how
- The paper should be neat and clean to attract the examiner
- I approached Google
- There were internet cafés
- By the grace of Almighty Allah
- I discussed this issue with my friend who is an engineer at Engro Corporation.

- Today's university is quite different from the knowledge we were getting 12 years ago.
- Also appeared in the MDCAT examination.

These stories are recorded and involve students' narratives of how they succeed during remote teaching and learning. It is important to note that these students have just started their university education and all universities have been shut down due to the widespread pandemic COVID-19. These stories reflect the socio-cultural background to which these students belong. Students studying from other parts of the world may find it hard to relate to these stories but surely through these stories, we learn how difficult it is for these students to study, learn, and succeed in a second or foreign language i.e., English. For an evaluative device, it needs to identify both an evaluative device and the material in the story which it evaluates. Therefore, it has drawn a chart that shows both aspects of the evaluation structure that stipulates whether the evaluative material is an event or a Durative-Descriptive (Polanyi, 1981).

Dramatis Personae	Descriptive Information	Events
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The students ▪ The Teacher ▪ The unfavorable circumstances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How well did they study during remote learning? ▪ What strategies did they adopt? ▪ What went well and what did not go well? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Practice precise writing ▪ Studied grammar ▪ Watching English movies helped ▪ Reading different articles ▪ Went through all notes ▪ I asked questions ▪ I discussed this issue ▪ I took classes online

For Polanyi's framework, the initial step in the formation of the Adequate Paraphrase is the division of the narrative into individual clauses. An Adequate Paraphrase includes key events and heavily evaluative durative descriptive data. It aims to portray the relationship among these components of the stories which mirrors how they interact in the story. The next step is to enlist all the propositions that directly are related to the

Durative Descriptive Clauses and Mainline Story Clauses and finally combine these heavily evaluated Duartive-Descriptive Propositions and Story Episodes into a paraphrase that upholds the unique ordering of the clauses. Following are certain examples of Adequate Paraphrases from the students' success stories.

- So, in this critical situation, I worked hard in submitting assignments on time, taking classes regularly, and making deep research on topics that were given by the sir. It was the first semester, and I did not know the ways how to solve the paper.
- . I belong to a remote area of Baluchistan. There were no internet signals in my area, and I had to travel daily for forty-five kilometers to cities. There were internet cafés and I used to attend all classes there except four or five that I left due to unavailability of the internet.
- English is a thing that depends on practice.
- I devised a strategy on this not to get too much indulged in grammar but write by writing he said ‘write what you read’ this helped me, I was able to write more, think, and create sentences of my own. This reduced my mistakes in time.
- I focused on improving my grammar. I watched videos, talked, and practiced MCQ questions for this. You know these mock online practice questions. Secondly, I started studying other books to enhance my vocabulary. Thirdly, for creative writing you know, I started looking around at any subject and started writing a few lines about it.
- As Urdu is our national language, so it was difficult to move from Urdu to the complex system of learning English.

Discussion

The entire narrative of these students revolves around how these students document and recount their successful journeys in an ESL context and class. These stories carry significant importance as they focus on their experiences of remote learning and teaching. The major argument of this paper is to draw these success stories that provide data to test Polanyi’s conversational narrative framework on its structural components and this meta-analysis highlight the problems as well as the potential of the said narrative model of

analysis in the field of narratology (de Ramirez, 1997; Watson, 1973). Polanyi’s framework helps us in determining several significant components of the narratives like Non-Storyworld Clauses, Main Line Story Events, evaluative structure, Adequate Paraphrase, and Durative-Descriptive Events. There is an advantage in knowing these stories since the entire world of academia is part of the social structure and the students are viewed as important stakeholders in this process of learning and teaching. These students’ stories are informed by the worldviews in which they exist, their experiences, and possibilities despite countless difficulties and offer an innate ability to investigate their worldviews to create coherence out of apparent chaos, distinguish between the possible and impossible, between what has been achieved and what is yet to achieve, and what they found useful and what they found less useful in their academic journeys.

However, Polanyi’s model offers a framework yet there are problems in applying her framework to the meta-analysis of a narrative as this framework is built on the Labovian approach. About the Non-Storyworld clause, Polanyi’s methodology manages conversational narratives in a better way, but Polanyi’s framework generates a text with multiple clauses than an interactive model and such a framework produces a text-based on many clauses, which is difficult to analyze and work with (Blum-Kulka, 2009). This difficulty might lead to an analysis that is in certain cases redundantly complex. For instance, Polanyi’s framework and her classification of an independent clause are too broad for such kind of evaluation and analysis that is being conducted in this study (Polanyi, 2005). Her inclusion as isolated independent clauses of incomplete phrases, false starts, and repetitions represents a narrative text which is not only on clumsy grounds but also omits the researcher’s wondering what such a classification of clauses adds to the framework. There are rife occurrences in the ‘success stories of the students’ where such clauses serve no useful purpose.

When we go through Polanyi's work and find that she faces difficulty in applying her own-built model to the conversational narrative data. For instance, Polanyi applies the same model in "Eating on the New York Thruway", an interactional narrative, she fails to follow her own given instructions. She does not even let the readers have access to the complete transcript of the data and she picks and chooses what she thinks best suits her needs from that narrative (Aukerman, 2006; Watson, 1973). This thwarts the complete understanding of a narrative that ought to unfold in a conversation. Then, during the analysis, legion clauses go missing or omitted without any explanation for the readers. Another serious criticism of Polanyi's methodology can be of its intended results, which is that the methodology presented by her fails to provide proper guidance to the researcher to an adequate paraphrase of a narrative. The application of this methodology repeatedly precedes the exclusion of certain clauses that seem quintessential to the narrative as well as the inclusion of clauses that do not seem crucial to produce an Adequate Paraphrase (Labov & Waletzky 1997; Riessman, 2001.; Schmidt, 2007).

Conclusion

This paper looked at the students' success stories in the ESL context and class during the remote teaching and learning phase. Nevertheless, with the help of Polanyi's methodological framework, the structural components of these conversational narratives are analyzed. These stories carry significant importance as the students focus on their experiences of remote learning and teaching. These success stories provide data to test Polanyi's conversational narrative framework and this meta-analysis highlights the problems as well as the potential of the said narrative model of analysis in the field of narratology. Polanyi's framework helps us in determining several significant components of the narratives like Non-Storyworld Clauses, Main Line Story Events, evaluative structure, Adequate Paraphrase, and Durative-Descriptive Events and

offers a unique perspective through these stories on how students' stories remain significant and vary from one culture to the other culture. It is hoped that such a study of students' success stories will help in understanding the structural components of these stories and help us in realizing the challenges confronted by ESL students.

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